

Tape 327

Ted Hatch

Interviewed by Kathleen Irving, 26 April 2002

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Ted Hatch is discussing his business and experiences he has had on the Colorado River.

Ted Hatch (Ted): Well, basically, our company runs the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River. The Green River's a tributary running into the Colorado River, so I guess I would probably apply to that designation.

One of the most interesting things I did in the Grand Canyon was a trip I took through the lower portion of Grand Canyon, and we hauled a car down the river to Lake Mead. No one had ever tried anything like this and we didn't really get into it in a normal procedure. I'd worked all summer long running boats down in the Grand Canyon. I hadn't been home for weeks and I was ready to come back home and I was really tired. Pelican Film Company called Pat [Hatch, his wife] and wanted to know if we would work on a film for them. They were doing a commercial on the new 1973 Ford cars. I was so tired, I didn't even want to talk to them, but I thought, I owe them the courtesy of a return call and I'll give them a bid and I'll bid really high and they won't take the bid. I went to bed and I got up the next morning and I was still tired and didn't want to talk to them, but I thought, I'll double that bid. Which I did. I called Cal McKean and Richard Gagnon, in New York, and I talked to them about taking a car down the canyon. I felt confident we could do it, but it would take quite a bit of preparation and work.

To my surprise they said, "Yeah, we want to go do it and we'll pay you the money you've bid. We'll fly out from New York and meet you."

I said, "I'll go to Vernal." We talked about the equipment I would need to do the job.

Kathleen Irving (KI): At this time where were you based down there?

Ted: At that time I was in Paige, Arizona. I came to Vernal and got more equipment, met the fellows and flew to Idaho because they weren't sure about doing the Grand Canyon at that time. We looked at the main Salmon River and went down part of the main Salmon to decide whether or not to take the car in that area. But the producers and directors didn't want to do that area. It was too pretty and not formidable enough. The rapids weren't as big as we wanted to test. So, we flew back to Grand Canyon. In the meantime I had hired some people to help us build a ramp and deck for the boat so we could put it all together with just side tubes and cover it with slabs to make it look like a log raft, which was what they had in mind for the shot.

They brought in helicopters and a crew to work on the movie, the film for the commercial. So, we went into Diamond Creek, which is down near Peach Springs, Arizona, and built this raft, got everything prepared to load the car. Well, Shorty Burton was a pretty good carpenter as well as a riverman and he built the ramp so we could load that car on the rubber boat. If anybody has ever walked around on a rubber boat, you know that they are somewhat unstable in the water. They're jittery and they move around. So when the director got down there, he decided, no, you can't load the car on the raft, it'll tip over. This isn't going to work.

So they went up on the beach and were arguing with some of the crew about something else. I got in the car, drove it onto the raft and stopped it and Shorty and I got out and chained it

down. Then they all laughed, because we *could* do it. No one had ever tried it on those big rapids.

We chained the car down and carefully hid the chains underneath the structure so it wouldn't show up on the movie shot. As we got ready, we did some more cosmetic effects to the raft and had it covered with slabs to look like a Huckleberry Finn-type raft. Of course, it was a lot bigger. It was hauling a brand new LTD Ford, 1973, with air conditioning and everything on it. Underneath the boat, we had built a cockpit where I would crawl underneath the car and run a motor to guide this raft down through the Grand Canyon.

Now, there are six major rapids in that area that we had to run and the first one was really a mean one, called Travertine Falls. So, we went out into the river with the raft, and I'm running it down to the falls. The helicopter went down ahead. We went in the helicopter first to look at the rapid to see exactly where I could take the car. We stopped and they let six cameramen out, three on each side of the river to climb up into the rocks and take movies of the shot. They wanted to get it the first time and they had the cameramen at different altitudes. One would be on ground level, one in the middle of the canyon, and one up about 1500 to 2000 feet on the cliff.

Well, we used the helicopter to go up there, because it would have been all day climbing up there with the camera gear. When we got to the top cliff, there was no place to land. But this 'copter pilot was really good and he went over to the edge of the cliff and just put one skid on the cliff and held the copter out with one skid out in the open air. He told us to hurry and jump out, which we all did. We got the cameramen ready on that side and then the other side, then he came back and got us and we went back down and got the raft and we started down the run to Travertine Falls.

When you're underneath the car, I realized you can't see very well. So my approach to Travertine was pretty cautious. I thought, "You know, I could tip this over." I wondered at the time how I would get out if the car did tip out because it might break loose from the raft and go to the bottom and I might be tangled in it. But I ran the boat down through there. There was a lot of water in the canyon running at that time. I hit the slot, luckily, in the right place and hit the big waves and just went up in the air and down and then my handle broke. I couldn't steer and I'm underneath the car and we're going through the tail end of the rapids and I was afraid I'd wash into the cliff and it would wreck the car. So I got out the back and climbed out. They'd made their shots. We were in the fast water, but it was drifting toward shore. I was waving for the fellows to come over and help me because I'd lost power and I couldn't change the motor underneath the car, nor could I put another handle on it.

I waved, and my old best friend, Shorty Burton, came over and he had a raft and he said, "I can't stop you." I said, "Turn around and run right into my outfit. You can slow me down." He did. Then we threw some lines alongside and tied him off. He had a twenty-eight foot nylon neoprene pontoon. Then he managed to edge me over to this little sandy spit on the shore. The movie people came in on the helicopter and we all got on the beach there and talked about that first rapid. I said, "You know, I just don't think this is very stable. I might lose this car." The director came over and said, "Oh don't worry, Ford Motor Company makes a lot of cars!"

He had three stunt men and I said, "Why don't you have one of your stunt men take the raft and run it because I'm not too sure I want to even do this." And they said, "Oh, you've got to. We've got to do it. It's for this very important commercial." They were going to use it for the halftime commercial for Ford Motor Company at the Rose Bowl football game. They were paying us a lot of money. In those days, the average guy made about \$20 a day and they were

paying us per man per boat, five times that amount. So, we were still going to stay and work.

But we decided to take the boat and I would get it lined up again, only I'd run a rubber raft above it and we'd tie a line to the car on the wooden raft, the covered boat, then line it up with the next rapid, then turn it loose. Then we'd run down behind it and catch it with the other rubber boats.

KI: Just totally unmanned?

Ted: Yeah. We had to hire some more men, so we brought in a crew of six to run the three rubber boats on each side to work as cushions to catch the runaway car-raft. I hired some guys. PJ Wells, a fellow from Las Vegas, had an airplane that he'd brought over to watch us do this shot. And he said, "Well, I'll help you." His wife was the famous singer named Sarah Vaughn. Anyway, PJ said he'd help. The movie people immediately hired him because they needed more men. We had our six rivermen, but that was all. At night when we camped on shore, waiting for the right sun conditions and the right cloud conditions and the right everything for the producers, we'd all go out in the 'copter and stay at the motel at Peach Springs, Arizona. Well, after a few days of this, it got quite expensive and the director asked if we wouldn't mind camping on shore like we did on our trips and he'd buy us anything we wanted. So we all had big steak dinners every night, and everything we wanted to drink. They'd bring beer and wine and pop and steaks, and we'd camp on shore.

It was so much fun to wait for them because they wouldn't get out of bed until 10 o'clock, then they'd wait for the sun to be just right, then we'd get ready to go. So, we'd sit around and play poker. One morning we were parked on a sandbar and we all got out and were playing poker, nickel-ante poker. One of the fellows turned around and part of the 'copter was in the water! The water had come up underneath the helicopter and was washing across the floor of the helicopter, about to take it away. He ran out through the water, got in the 'copter and started it and took off with this big stream of water running out of the helicopter. He got it up and parked it on a higher place. Then he came back down and said, "Don't tell anybody." But we about lost our 'copter! We were all surprised at that. He wasn't that good at poker. He was an awfully good pilot, but he lost some nickels to us.

We got ready and took the boat out again with the car on it, the raft, and tied the line to it and ran a boat upstream and got it in position so we could cut the line and turn it loose. Well, we went to turn the line loose and it was tangled. It was all messed up. We couldn't cut it on the boat that was pulling the raft because it would show in the shot. So, we had to swing the pulling boat around to the log raft to untie the rope. PJ decided he'd jump across and untie it, then we'd pick him up. I circled in to the raft and PJ jumped onto the raft and he untied the line and we let it go. Then I looked up and we were into the rapid, the next rapid, a great big one and I said, "I can't get you, PJ!" Earl Leesburg was there and he yelled at PJ: "Get in the car, and lay on the seat!"

KI: Who was he?

Ted: Earl Leesburg was one of the pilots that flew the movie people around. He owns Lake Mead Air Service. He said, "Jump in the car and lay down!" So, PJ did. And he went into the great big rapid, without any control, inside the car, lying on the front seat. We hurried down after him with the rescue boats and we caught it. We'd run into it. We had rings on our boats so we could snap a

chain to them and catch that raft when it came out of the rapid. We caught it. They got some more pictures of it. PJ jumps out and he says, "Don't worry about a thing! I've got the keys!" Everybody just cracked up! It was *so* funny. I didn't tell you, but PJ was a black fellow. His wife, Sarah Vaughn, if you know her, was a famous black singer.

Anyway, we got the car and lined it up for the next rapid. We worked like that for a week, then another week, and we're making a lot more money than boatmen ever made in a year. We worked thirty days doing that commercial.

KI: How many rapids were there altogether?

Ted: There are six major rapids before you get to Lake Mead. Gneise Canyon is the last one. We ran Gneise Canyon and we were all ready to go home, tired. Anyway, we got past Separation Point and it's hot on Lake Mead. It was late August, early September, I don't know. But we're all hot, so we thought, "Let's get in the car and start it and run the air conditioner while we get out across the lake." The movie people went up to Temple Bar Marina and Las Vegas Harbor. They were going to bring a big power boat out to meet us and pull us in because they wanted to finish the shot on the beach there at Temple Bar Marina. So, we're in the car with the air conditioner going and we're drinking beer and we're having a big party, we're having a great time. One of the fellows had bought a cowboy hat and we'd put it on like we were driving the car and one of the guys had a cigar. So, I put the cigar in my mouth and the cowboy hat and I was going like I was driving the car. Whenever anyone came along, the other guys would lay down and the people on the lake thought I was driving across the lake. A power boat came up and the guy turned around and he's beating on the hood of his boat and laughing. I said, "Do you know the way to Kingman?" He thought we were driving the car across the lake on that raft. Then we all jumped up and waved at him and he saw who we were and came over and we visited and had a few beers. Then we went on.

Every time a power boat came by, we'd stage this same thing. We laughed until our stomach hurts. People were really receptive to it. They came to see it. They took pictures. They thought it was the funniest thing they ever saw.

That afternoon the movie guys showed up with this power boat. They were concerned because they thought we had taken too long to get there. We could only go about four miles an hour. So they hooked this giant boat to the raft and said they'd pull us on in. So they started up the boat and broke the line. They hooked it up again and broke the line again because the rubber boats just don't tow very well. He could only go about six miles an hour. We all got in the big boat and they had quite a celebration. We didn't get to Temple Bar Marina until late that night.

The next morning we finished the shots with the car going down the beach and the 'copter following it, taking pictures and we washed the car again and cleaned it up and had it ready to go. They used those shot. The movie part of it was only about three minutes long and we worked like thirty-something days with six men and I don't know how many they had in their crews. Six photographers and Dick Durance, that does the ski films, was the head cameraman. He got the shots and just did a beautiful job. We all waited. I loaded out boats and sent the crew home, but they kept me around until the whole movie thing was finished. By then, my wife flew down from Vernal and met me at Temple Bar and we went on home.

At the tail end, they invited everyone to dinner in Las Vegas. Well, PJ had a brand new Porsche car and he wanted to fly his plane back, so he asked if I'd drive his car to Vegas, which

was a tough assignment, but I drove his brand new Porsche over to Vegas, then we had dinner in this real nice restaurant. A neat treat of the whole thing, before they went home, was that Sarah Vaughn came in, we asked her if she'd sing for us and she did. It was just terrific. She was a jazz singer. She was very good. She sang several songs and had dinner with us. She was doing a show in Las Vegas, so after dinner, she had to go back and do this show. PJ took her and thanked me for bringing his new car. They all left and we went back to Vernal.

It was just something that no one had ever done. When we got ready for the Rose Bowl football game, whenever that is will tell you what time we finished the job, we got in our chairs and watched the TV commercials because *there we were*. It was a lot of fun, but, oh, I was tired. I made so much money on that trip that I flew to Las Vegas and bought about eight or fourteen rubber boats to use in the river season the next year. I had rubber boats all over the place. It basically financed me to get the river company started in those days.

KI: Tell me how you're related to Bus.

Ted: He's my father.

KI: His real name was?

Ted: Robert Rafael. He had his name legally changed to B-U-S, Bus. There's quite a few Hatches in the cemetery and they're relatives of ours, but he changed his name to Bus. He liked a short name. He said, "When you write on a check, you don't want to have to write 'Robert Rafael.'"

KI: Is that the end of the story?

Ted: That's one story.

KI: Do you want to tell me another? This will be a small, short story.

Ted: One summer we were running trips through the Grand Canyon. People don't always tell you if they're famous or rich or whatever. They just sign up and go on the trip. For example, Sam Walton's wife went with us one year and we didn't know that she was probably the most wealthy woman in the United States and she didn't tell us until after she finished the expedition through the Grand Canyon. But this one movie starlet came along, and I can't remember her name. But anyway, she came along on a trip. She was a beautiful gal and she insisted on having her tent pitched every night so she could change clothes for dinner.

Well, the river hands, we'd run in the river with a bar of soap and clean up, then get dressed, but we wore our Levis or our river clothes to dinner because it wasn't a big event. So, each night she'd get in the tent and change clothes and she didn't want to be bothered by anyone. She slept all by herself and didn't seem to have anyone in the group that she knew very well. One interesting sidelight was that her tent was white and when she went in the tent, she'd turn on a lantern and change clothes. I don't think she knew, but you could see right through that tent. So, no one told her about this. They didn't want to embarrass her, I guess. But it was kind of a sidelight each night to watch her change in the tent.

After three or four days, we camped at a place downriver where the beach was quite cut

off. The river had changed course. It had been flooding and it was before the dam at Lake Powell, so the water would come up pretty fast when there was a flood upstream. Obviously, there was a rainstorm or something and the water was coming up. She'd put her tent on the edge of the sandbar and gone to bed. We'd all gone to bed and the water was rising, so we slept a little farther back from the edge of the stream. Well, as the water came up, it started to undercut the tent. She had been told that it was cooler to be closer to the water, which it is when you're sleeping because of the evaporation. It's a nice way to ventilate your sleeping area. It is cooler. So anyway, she's out on the edge of this sand spit and it collapses. She falls into the water and she's still in her tent. We hear her screaming and we get up and can't see anyone. We're in our shorts because this is an emergency. We run down to the beach and we hear this splashing and, finally, someone came up with a flashlight and we shined it into the water and there she was in the tent, in the water, going down.

I dove in and got hold of the tent and another guide with me, Bruce Lium, grabbed the other part and we pulled her back to shore. We drug the tent up on the sand and she got out and she was terrified. And we said, "Why didn't you undo the zipper and get out?" She said, "Well, if you're turning over and over in the water in the river, how do you know where the zipper is?"

After that, I noticed the next night, our sideshow was over. She didn't change in her tent anymore. She didn't even sleep in it. She slept out on the sand.

KI: You don't remember her name, though?

Ted: I can't remember her name and she's famous. I better not say anyway.